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# CONFERENCE *connection*

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SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE, UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

December 2, 2020

## Advent Like No Other

Grace to you and peace! In previous years it was sometimes a challenge to observe the season of Advent while Christmas shopping, decorations, and other preparations were already in full swing. How could we help people identify the sense of yearning and longing that our scriptures describe in preparation for the birth of Jesus? The scriptures have lifted up images of searching, aching, persevering, while waiting for signs of hope.

This year provides the opportunity to put Advent within a special context. Because of the pandemic; because of the sharpened awareness of issues of racism and injustice; because of the blatant divisiveness within our country, we can more readily identify with the feeling that the world is falling apart. We more readily understand the challenge of living with uncertainty and fear.

But the Advent season also brings a message of hope within the heaviness; a message that God is alive and active in the world! So as we continue through the weeks ahead and experience the darkness, may we also hear the message of hope and seek the spark of light within the weariness and despair. There is more to hope than a future vaccine. There is the hope that we can find a way to build a better world and further the kin-dom of God. Advent is the reminder that God has always been faithful and God will continue to be faithful! Advent blessings! Char



**The Conference Office will be closed December 24- January 3.**

## News from the Conference Office

### Sharing Advent/Christmas Music with Other Churches

Not all of our local churches that are worshipping online have the ability to include special music selections. If your church is including special Christmas music by your choir or musicians online and if you are willing to share it with other local churches for their worship, please contact Heather Fosburgh ([hfosburgh@secucc.org](mailto:hfosburgh@secucc.org)) and we will explore how that can happen!

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### End-of-the-Year Procedures and Financial Deadlines

The end of 2020 is fast approaching, and we need your help to make our year-end bookkeeping and crediting as efficient and timely as possible. All 2020 OCWM and UCC Special Offering checks must **arrive at the Conference Office by January 11** to receive credit for 2020 Giving. Because of the issues with mail delays, it is recommended that remittances be made earlier in December. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Heather Fosburgh at [hforburgh@secucc.org](mailto:hforburgh@secucc.org) or 404-719-6572.

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### Last Call for January Communities of Practice

Communities of Practice in the Southeast Conference will begin in January. If you have been thinking about joining a group and have not contacted Char Burch ([cburch@secucc.org](mailto:cburch@secucc.org)), please do so by December 7. The details of the Communities of Practice program are [available on our website](#). Facilitators will be contacting those who have expressed interest and arranging for the group meetings in January.

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## SEC Annual Meeting June 18-19, 2021

Want to be part of creating something new? With the decision of the Board of Directors to have a virtual Annual Meeting in 2021, we are seeking individuals who are interested in planning creative opportunities for virtual worship, workshops, and business. If you are interested, please contact Char Burch ([cburch@secucc.org](mailto:cburch@secucc.org)).

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## Clergy Zoom Connections for December

- **An Hour of Conversations and Prayer**

Tuesdays, December 1, 8, 15, 22 - 11:00 a.m. Eastern (10:00 a.m. Central)

Zoom: <https://zoom.us/j/479440102>

- **Live Harp Meditations for Ministers**

Thursday, December 17- 12:00 p.m. Eastern (11:00 Central)

20 minutes of meditation with Celtic harp. Silent prayer and reflection following if desired, facilitated by Rev. Jean Norton. (For questions or to sign up for individual Therapeutic Harp Sessions, contact Jean at [HeartSongJean@gmail.com](mailto:HeartSongJean@gmail.com).)

Zoom: <https://zoom.us/j/96976838422>

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## Re-Opening of Churches – Conversation for all Church Leaders

### **Mondays, December 14, 7 pm Eastern/6 pm Central**

As things keep changing regarding COVID-19 and reopening churches, we want to continue the conversation, developing safe and best practices. There is also the question about what churches might maintain into the future. We invite all Moderators, Church Leaders, and Clergy to be part of the conversation. [REGISTER](#)

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## Prayer List

We are continuing the process of praying for authorized ministers, congregations, and ministry groups throughout 2020. We encourage you to include these prayer requests in your local church newsletter, share them with your prayer circle, and include them in your own prayers.

### Week of December 6

- Sandy Creek UCC; LaFayette, Alabama
- Wendy Coleman
- James Bowman Harris
- Maureen Shelton
- Sonya Williams
- Mary Beth Hayes

### Week of December 13

- Jones Chapel Congregational Christian; Woodbury, Georgia
- First Congregational UCC; Marion, Alabama
- Deborah Douglas
- Eulas Kirtdoll
- Angie Wright
- Stephanie Milton
- Holly Nelson

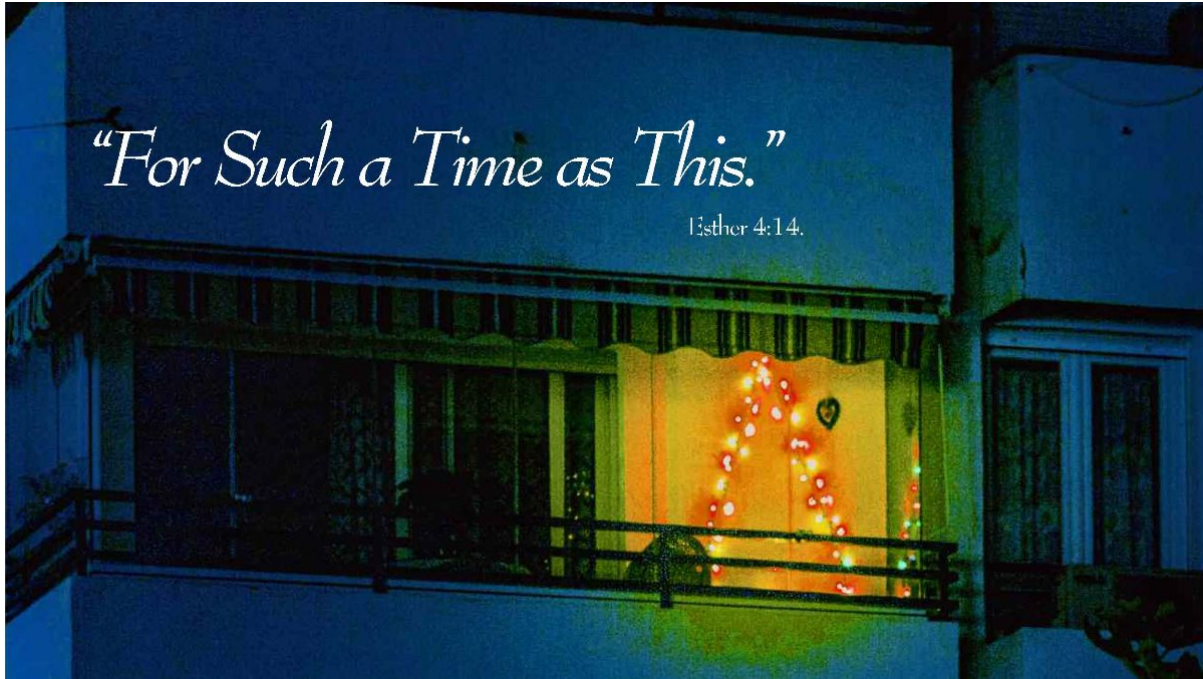
## Churches in Transition

First Congregational, Savannah GA; Trinity Congregational, Athens AL; Open Table, Mobile AL; Rush Memorial, Atlanta GA; United Church of Cookeville, Cookeville TN; Pleasant Hill Community Church, Pleasant Hill TN; Safe



Harbor Family Church, Clinton MS

## News from the Wider Church



### The Christmas Fund – UCC Special Offering

It is time to remember the UCC Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and Emergency Fund. The Christmas Fund has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, and Christmas “Thank You” gift checks each December to our lower-income retirees.

In the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, the United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance, which administers the Christmas Fund, experienced a 400% increase in requests for emergency grants over the previous year. Many requests were from pastors whose churches could not pay them because in-person worship services ceased and offerings were down. Thanks to the generosity of more than 275 donors to urgent appeals for gifts to the Christmas Fund, UCBMA was able to say “yes” to each of these requests. For more information:

<https://www.pbucc.org/index.php/christmas-fund-home>.

Also, once again this year, there is a wonderful coloring book available for FREE for download from the Pension Boards website. It is especially

relevant this year, as it talks about the pandemic and quarantine and how it relates to our faith. [Download the Coloring Book.](#)



## A Very UCC Christmas: 2020

The staff of the national setting is providing an array of worship resources for Advent and Christmas: Eleven digital hymns are ready for download and use now. A Christmas Pageant and Full Worship Service is in process.

Check the website at [https://www.ucc.org/christmas\\_pageant\\_2020](https://www.ucc.org/christmas_pageant_2020).

The 11 Digital hymns as music videos are as follows:

- O Come, O Come Emmanuel (with John 1: 1-5)
- In the Bleak Midwinter (with Luke 2: 1-5)
- Star of Country Down (with Luke 1: 46-56)
- Away In a Manger /Santo Santo Santo
- O Come All Ye Faithful
- Each Winter as the Year Grows Older - v 1 & 3
- Jesus, Jesus, What a Wonderful Child
- Angels We Have Heard on High
- O Little Town of Bethlehem
- Silent Night
- Go Tell it on the Mountain

In addition, the Lessons and Carols will be streamed on Christmas Eve for all on Facebook and Youtube as Thursdays for the Soul (3:30 p.m. ET/ 2:30

p.m. CT/ 1:30 p.m. MT/ 12:30pm PT/ 11:30 a.m. Alaska, and 10:30 a.m. HI).

The Full Movie "A Very UCC Christmas: 2020" will be streamed on our platforms (YouTube and Facebook) on Dec. 27, 10 a.m. ET.

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## Survey for Female Laity and Clergy

The UCC Women's Table is seeking to gather information from women in the UCC about the issues and concerns most cared about, and for which faithful responses make a difference in the world. The staff of the UCC's Center for Analytics, Research & Development and Data (CARD) is conducting the survey. The survey can be accessed at [https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/MoMs\\_ucc](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/MoMs_ucc). Responses will be strictly confidential and anonymous. It will take approximately 10 minutes to complete the survey. Please have your responses included by Friday, December 11, at 11:59 pm EDT.

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## UCC Overdose & Drug Use Ministries

Two years ago, in response to the opioid crisis, the UCC Health and Wholeness Advocacy Office, began working to establish an Overdose and Drug Use Ministry (ODUM). They have done much in providing webinars and developing an Overdose and Drug Use Ministry web presence on UCC.org. They are now seeking to identify, train, and resource teams of leaders across the UCC who are equipped to assist and accompany local churches to do their planning and acquire the skills and tools they need to engage in overdose and drug use ministries, meeting the particular needs of their congregations and the communities they serve. If this is something of interest to you, check the UCC website or contact Erica Poellot, project director: [poellote@ucc.org](mailto:poellote@ucc.org), (646) 660-1166.

## Local Church News

### Scholarship Opportunity from Pilgrim Church

The Milnes Fund of Pilgrim Congregational Church, UCC, was established in 1996 through a bequest from Jack and Marjory Milnes to provide scholarships for individuals studying to become ministers in the United Church of Christ.

To apply for a scholarship, please submit the following:

1. current *curriculum vita* and
2. cover letter which:
  - a. includes a statement of ministerial philosophy;
  - b. outlines future hopes/plans for ministry in the United Church of Christ;
  - c. describes financial need; and
  - d. provides three references, including one from your pastor.

Award amount may be up to \$3,000.

The application must be received by December 5, 2020 for the second semester and should be sent to [Mail@Pilgrim-Church.com](mailto:Mail@Pilgrim-Church.com) in the subject line please put Attn: Milnes Scholarship.

## Trainings and Conferences

### The Cultivating Generous Congregations Seminar for Pastors and Lay Leaders

This seminar offers an opportunity to explore faithful, practical, and tested ways to promote generosity in your congregation. The Seminar will draw on current research, guidance from the wisdom of scripture, and discussion of the best practices in church-based fundraising. The Cultivating Generous Congregations Seminar for 2021 will include six online sessions and will be taught by the Rev. Andy DeBraber and Rev. Andrew Warner, Generosity Officers of the national setting. Tuesdays – Feb. 9, Feb. 23, Mar. 9, Mar. 23, Apr. 13, and Apr. 23: 6:30pm Eastern to 8:00pm Eastern In between class sessions, Andy and Andrew will provide materials to help analyze the culture of your own congregation and learn how to create change. Be sure to recruit at least a team of two for this program. Changing the culture of your congregation requires more than one dedicated leader. Success depends on engaging a team of leaders from your congregation. [REGISTER.](#)

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### Save-the-Date for Mediation Training

Does your congregation experience conflict? Does it harm your Christian fellowship and distract from your church's mission? Learn to transform conflict from a negative force into an opportunity for reconciliation and



growth. Register now for one of these six sessions of our popular and practical *Mediation Skills Training Institute for Church Leaders*: March 1-5, May 3-7, June 21-25, August 2-6, October 11-15, or November 15-19, 2021. The "early bird" rate is \$695. Currently, we plan to conduct this event online via Zoom. NOTE: After December 2020, online registration will no longer be available via Brown Paper Tickets. To register or to learn more, contact the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center at 630-627-0507 or [Admin@LMPeaceCenter.org](mailto:Admin@LMPeaceCenter.org).

## Conference Calendar

December 8 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EST

[Clergy Conversations via Zoom](#)

December 14 @ 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm EST

[Re-Opening of Churches – Conversation for all Church Leaders](#)

December 15 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EST

[Clergy Conversations via Zoom](#)

December 17 @ 12:00 pm - 12:30 pm EST

[Live Harp Meditations for Ministers](#)

December 22 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EST

[Clergy Conversations via Zoom](#)

December 24, 2020 - January 3, 2021

[Conference Office Closed for Christmas Holiday](#)

View the **full calendar** of events online: <https://www.secucc.org/events/>

## Contact Us

Conference Minister: **Rev. Char Burch**; [cburch@secucc.org](mailto:cburch@secucc.org)

Assoc. Conf. Minister: **Rev. Heather Fosburgh**; [hfosburgh@secucc.org](mailto:hfosburgh@secucc.org)

Generosity Coordinator: **Min. Carrole Moss**; [cmoss@secucc.org](mailto:cmoss@secucc.org)

Director of Communications: **Don Harris**; [dharris@secucc.org](mailto:dharris@secucc.org)